

To: Connecticut State Budget Appropriations Committee,

Currently the Appropriations Committee is hearing testimony regarding the School Readiness Quality Enhancement Grant. Bridgeport, a community that services 1,704 children in School Readiness, uses these funds for critical operations. The Quality Enhancement Grant funds activities that are crucial to maintaining programs in School Readiness. The funds are used to provide First Aid and CPR training, which is required by Connecticut Child Care Licensing and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation. If Quality Enhancement is not available to provide these services and funding, each program would need to find ninety-five dollars (\$95.00) per staff member to provide this training. This would stress an already thin program budget. The funds are also used to support Administration of Medication and EPI-Pen training to programs. Without this training, programs would be unable to service children with asthma, diabetes, and use of an EPI-PEN in a life threatening emergency. Again the programs would struggle with an already stretched budget to find another ninety (\$90.00) per staff member to provide this training.

The funds also support professional development, working towards the goal of highly qualified staff in preschool classrooms. The grant has provided initial training in the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS). After completing the initial standards training, a deeper and more substantial support has been given to executive function, math, science and social studies. Teachers have been given the opportunity to apply for individual coaching, a process that brings about substantial positive changes to the classroom. This year some programs had the opportunity to utilize the Project Approach, rich in teacher/children collaboration and an exploration of a topic with significant depth of knowledge. There are also professional development opportunities for directors and site coordinators, to strengthen their ability to support and manage staff.

Parents and the community are also critical partners. Quality Enhancement offers assistance to support the Family Resource Centers and Parent Center in Bridgeport. The grant provides resources for materials for parent activities, materials for young children and home care providers. It supplies training to home care providers, including CPR and safety training. Strengthening parents and home care providers in supporting children's growth and development is a vital enhancement for the entire community.

Quality Enhancement funds are being utilized to directly support health and safety training to assure that our youngest most vulnerable citizens are safe and in good hands. It ensures that children are able to come to school, because they can receive medication vital to their wellbeing. Children are in environments that provide intentional teaching and are rich in educational content.

The small sum of Quality Enhancement funds that Bridgeport receives (\$134.850) is not an expense. These funds assure that parents can go to work, children are safe, in appropriately trained hands and that they are in a program that provides a rigorous and challenging educational day. Eliminating these funds can lead to parents that are unable to go to work (needing state financial assistance) and children failing to have preschool experiences. Bridgeport urges the Appropriations Committee keeps a more substantial amount of funds in the Quality Enhancement budget line. Twenty-five thousand dollars will not allow us to provide critical services to the early childhood community.